

DATES OF BIBLICAL EVENTS
Taught by Willis E. Bishop
February 23, 1999

Item written in a prayer letter from Linda Burnet (serving in Hawaii with Berean Mission, Inc.):

When we look back and wonder how we ever made it this far, we realize it has not been because we have been clever, but because God has been wise. Not because we have been strong, but because God has been mighty. Not because we have been consistent, but because God has been faithful.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, we thank You this morning that it is this sort of God and Savior to whom we look, who understands all about us and loves us just the same. We pray that we shall honor Him and love Him and serve Him with a whole heart. We pray that the strength we have will glorify You wholly today. For we ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

In our studies, and especially on dating the exodus of Israel from Egypt, it has occurred to me that we have not dealt with dates with regard to biblical events. You are aware that our Bible text does not say "700 B.C." or "20 A.D." You may have a Bible that has marginal figures, but those are not a biblical text at all. Those are figures that someone has arrived at by various calculations. This morning I want to go into that in showing how wonderfully the Scripture works together.

We will begin with the Eponym lists. In Old Testament times Assyria had what they called Eponym lists. They took a year and assigned to that year the name of an outstanding official: a king, a captain, or some other official in their government. Each year had a name attached to that year. They listed all of the important events that took place during that year, and they kept those records for centuries.

Archaeologists have located those records and they found that in those Eponym lists there was the occurrence of a solar eclipse and of a lunar eclipse. Not only archaeologists, but also those who studied the heavens could date particular events. One that was especially important to them occurred on June 15, 763 B.C. So they knew that whatever events were listed in that particular Eponym year took place in 763 B.C.

Apart from the Eponym lists they began to work on other matters. If I say to you, "I resigned from the Washington Bible College in 1982." Then on another occasion when I meet you I might say, "I moved to Good Samaritan Village after I resigned." When did I move to Good Samaritan Village? If you would remember my first statement, you would know that I moved to Good Samaritan Village in 1982.

That is what happened in the biblical events. For example, in the famous battle of Qarqar they listed that Shalmaneser, III had opposed

a coalition of twelve kings, including King Ahab of Israel. They could move from a date of the battle of Qarqar down to a date for King Ahab, and that they now know was in 854-853 B.C. So Ahab can be dated biblically at that time.

In the biblical records we have the length of the reigns of all the kings of Israel and Judah. Beginning with Ahab and computing those who reigned before him and those who reigned after him, they can actually figure the dates at which those kings reigned.

There are several problems in connection with this. One is the problem of co-regency. One king is on the throne, and before he dies or departs another king reigns with him. Those dates need to be adjusted.

Another problem is with the dating of what is called accession and non-accession years. In a given year the king would die before that year ended and another king would take over. Some called that part of the year an accession year, with the first year of the second king's reign being counted from the beginning of the next year. Others designated that part of the year as a non-accession year; in other words, as the first year of the reign of that second king with his second year of reign beginning the following year.

To repeat: Some kings were dated by an accession year, that is, their first year of reign began with the following year. Other kings had no accession year but simply started counting the first year of their reign as that part of the year in which they took office.

That raised some problems, and for a long time those problems were not settled. But a number of years ago a man named Thiele published an extensive work called The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings. He showed how these accession years used by Israel, the northern kingdom, and the non-accession years used by Judah in the southern kingdom worked into the biblical pattern. A chart is needed in order to figure this. Many details had to be worked out before they could clearly date many of the biblical kings.

Most of the solutions to the problems of dating in the Old Testament come from the fact that they can be dated from the archaeological chronology and from the parallel events occurring in that chronology in Judah and Israel.

There is another aid to dating biblical events. Turn to II Kings chapter 9. In this chapter, which we will discuss in brief, in verse 3, a man who had been sent by Elisha anointed Jehu king over Israel. (Jehu was quite a fellow -- a renegade in fact.)

In verse 14 Jehu conspired against Joram, king of Israel, and verse 14 goes on: (Now Joram had been defending Ramoth Gilead, he and all Israel, against Hazael king of Syria. But King Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him)

Then in verse 16: Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram was laid up there, and Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to [visit] Joram.

Jehu started out to "get those two kings." In verse 22: It happened that when Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" So he answered, "What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?" Then Joram turned around and fled and said to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" Now Jehu drew his bow with full strength and shot Joram beneath his arms, and the arrow came out at his heart....

Dead king number one. Verse 27: But when Ahaziah king of Judah saw this he fled by the road to Beth Haggan. So Jehu pursued him and said, "Shoot him also in the chariot." And they shot him at the Ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Megiddo and died there.

Death of king number two. What is important about this?

When men began to figure the dates with regard to the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, they had to come to the same date when both of these kings of Israel and Judah died. Using all the information, they arrived at a rather satisfactory solution to most of the dating problems.

Now to the dating of the exodus from Egypt. Turn to I Kings 6:1 (a very important date). In computing all these figures, it was determined that Solomon reigned from 971 to 931 B.C.: And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel ... he began to build the house of God.

Notice, "in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of Egypt," that would be the exodus. And notice that "in the fourth year of Solomon's reign" we come to 968-67 B.C. for the fourth year of his reign. That fourth year of Solomon's reign, according to I Kings 6:1, is the four hundred and eightieth year from the exodus. Adding 480 to 968-67 we get 1,448-47 B.C. as the date for the exodus.

You add 430 years (in Exodus 12:40) to 1,448-47 B.C. and get 1,878-77 B.C. as the date Jacob and his family went down into Egypt.

Prayer: Our Father, we thank You for the accuracy of the Scriptures and that we can determine much of how Your hand worked in connection with Your people. We pray that we can leave this Bible study loving You with all our hearts. Dismiss us with Your blessing for we ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.